

## Message Text

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14

ACTION EA-14

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SUBJ: TEMPER FLARE AS AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY SESSION NEARS  
END; PRIME MINISTER THREATENS RESIGNATION

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: TEMPER HAVE FLARED AS AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY  
SESSION NEARS ITS END FOR 1973. DECLINING LABOR GOVERNMENT  
ELECTORAL PROSPECTS AND HEAVY BURDEN OF LEGISLATION HAVE  
PRODUCED CONSIDERABLE IRRITATION IN BOTH HOUSE AND SENATE.  
EXTRAORDINARY DISPLAYS OF ABUSIVE LANGUAGE BY PRIME MINISTER AND  
LEADING OPPOSITION MEMBERS TOOK PLACE NOV 15, AND PRIME MINISTER  
LATER THREATENED TO RESIGN ON UNRELATED ISSUE OF LABOR CAUCUS  
RELATIONS WITH CABINET. NO U.S. INTERESTS INVOLVED, BUT  
INDICATIONS POINT TO FURTHER TENSIONS WHEN PARLIAMENT RESUMES  
IN FEBRUARY, 1974. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH SLIGHTLY MORE THAN THREE WEEKS LEFT OF THE BUDGET  
SESSION OF PARLIAMENT AND A MOUNTAIN OF LEGISLATION STILL TO  
BE PASSED THROUGH THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATE,  
TEMPERS HAVE BEGUN TO FLARE AND TENSIONS ARE RISING. THESE  
INCIDENTS HAVE LITTLE DIRECT EFFECT ON U.S. INTERESTS IN  
AUSTRALIA, BUT THEY ARE REPORTED IN PERSPECTIVE, AS VERSIONS  
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OF THEM MAY APPEAR IN THE AMERICAN PRESS.

3. WHEN PARLIAMENT RESUMED LAST WEEK AFTER A SHORT RECESS, THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE, MINISTER FOR SERVICES DALY, COMMENTED THAT ONE COMMODITY THAT WOULD BE IN SHORT SUPPLY IN THE REMAINDER OF THE SESSION WOULD BE GOOD WILL. HE CORRECTLY ANTICIPATED THE SITUATION, FOR THE LABOR GOVERNMENT PROPOSES TO GET ABOUT 200 BILLS THROUGH PARLIAMENT IN THE BUDGET SESSION WHICH BEGAN IN AUGUST. GIVEN THE LEISURELY PROCESSES OF THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT (ABOUT 12 SITTING DAYS PER MONTH) THIS MEANT ABOUT 48 SITTING DAYS TO DEBATE AND PASS 200 BILLS, MANY OF THEM HIGHLY DETAILED AND OF CONSIDERABLE SIGNIFICANCE. THERE IS NO COMMITTEE SYSTEM IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AND THE SENATE COMMITTEES ARE STILL IN A RUDIMENTARY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. HENCE, PRACTICALLY ALL BUSINESS IS HANDLED IN REGULAR SESSION OR WHEN ONE OR BOTH HOUSES SITS AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE.

4. AS EMBASSY REPORTING HAS MADE CLEAR OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, THE POLITICAL PROSPECTS OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT, AS REFLECTED IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS AND IN STATE AND FEDERAL BY-ELECTIONS, HAVE SLOWLY BUT STEADILY DETERIORATED UNTIL IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT EARLY ELECTIONS WOULD INVOLVE THE DEFEAT OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE SENATE HAS REJECTED A SERIES OF MAJOR GOVERNMENT BILLS OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS, SETTING THE STAGE FOR EARLY ELECTIONS, BUT THE PRIME MINISTER HAS STUDIOUSLY AVOIDED TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. FRUSTRATION HAS CLEARLY BEEN BUILDING IN THE PRIME MINISTER, WITH DISPLAYS OF PETULANCE AND REAL ANGER, BOTH IN PRIVATE AND IN SESSIONS OF PARLIAMENT.

5. LIBERAL-COUNTRY OPPOSITION HAS NOT BEEN SLOW TO REALIZE THAT PRIME MINISTER CAN BE NEEDLED AND PROVOKED, PARTICULARLY UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. AT QUESTION TIME IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES NOV 14 LIBERAL-COUNTRY OPPOSITION MEMBERS FREQUENTLY DROWNED PRIME MINISTER OUT WITH INTERJECTIONS, AND HIS TEMPER WAS VISIBLY RIGINS. EVENING OF NOV 14 DEPUTY LIBERAL LEADER LYNCH AND FORMER MINISTER FOR EDUCATION MALCOLM FRASER, BOTH OF WHOM ARE NORMALLY MODELS OF GOOD BEHAVIOR, WERE EXPELLED FROM HOUSE FOR CHALLENGING RULING OF SPEAKER ON PROCEDURAL MATTER.

6. PRIME MINISTER'S RECEPTION NOV 14 FOR VISITING NEW ZEALAND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRIME MINISTER KIRK SPARKED OFF ANOTHER EXPLOSION ON NOV 15. IN REFERENCE TO OPPOSITION ATTITUDE ON THREE REFERENDUM BILLS (PROVIDING FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTION OF HOUSE AND SENATE, SO-CALLED DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS ON BASIS OF ONE MAN ONE VOTE, AND POWER TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MAKE DIRECT GRANTS OF MONEY TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES, INSTEAD OF THROUGH STATES, AS AT PRESENT) PRIME MINISTER ACCUSED OPPOSITION OF ABUSING HIS HOSPITALITY NOV 14 (AT RECEPTION FOR KIRK) BY ATTEMPTING TO FRUSTRATE LATER SAME

EVENING RECORDING OF VOTE ON REFERENDUM BILLS. (BILLS IN FACT PASSED HOUSE NOV 14 BUT ARE STILL PENDING IN SENATE, WITH THEIR FATE STILL TO BE DETERMINED). REPLYING TO PRIME MINISTER, DR. A. J. FORBES (LIBERAL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA) SAID ON POINT OF ORDER HE FOUND WHITLAM'S REMARKS INSULTING AND DEMANDED WITHDRAWAL. SPEAKER SAID NO POINT OF ORDER INVOLVED, AND INCIDENT CLOSED. HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER CONTINUED, IN EFFECT ACCUSED FORBES AND LIBERAL LEADER SNEDDEN OF HAVING BEEN DRUNK AND STILL HUNG OVER, AND EXCHANGE OF ABUSIVE LANGUAGE FOLLOWED WITH WORDS "GUTLESS", "FOUL-MOUTHER", AND "FILTHY BASTARD" BEING FREELY USED. WHITLAM ULTIMATELY WITHDREW HIS REMARKS, BUT MORE OF SAME LIKELY IN DAYS AHEAD.

7. STILL EVIDENTLY SIMMERING, PRIME MINISTER LATER IN DAY IN PARLIAMENT THREATENED TO RESIGN IF LABOR CAUCUS CONTINUED TO ASSERT RIGHT TO RECEIVE SECRET CABINET DOCUMENTS AT SAME TIME CABINET RECEIVES THEM. LEADER OF CAUCUS REBELLION, U.E. INNES (MELBOURNE), ANNOUNCED LATER IN DAY HE WOULD WITHDRAW HIS MOTION, AND SITUATION RESTORED.

8. IN SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT SENATOR CAVANAGH (ALP, SOUTH AUSTRALIA), LEADER OF SENATE FOR ALP (MORE OR LESS EQUIVALENT OF MINORITY LEADER IN U.S. TERMS), RESIGNED NOV 15, EVIDENTLY HAVING HAD DISAGREEMENT WITH SENATOR MURPHY, GOVERNMENT LEADER IN SENATE, OVER HANDLING OF LEGISLATION.

9. COMMENT: NONE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS HELPS POSITION OR GOVERNMENT, THOUGH NO IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES EXPECTED FOR REST OF 1973. HOWEVER, LIBERAL-COUNTRY OPPOSITION HAS LEARNED HOW TO GET UNDER WHITLAM'S SKIN, MANY ALP MEMBERS ARE ON EDGE, AND KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO BRING SUCH A SITUATION ABOUT COULD BECOME OF KEY SIGNIFICANCE AFTER PARLIAMENT RESUMES SESSION IN FEBRUARY.

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